

For discussion
on 31 March 2023

Legislative Council Panel on Education

Planning for the provision of public sector primary and secondary school places in light of changes in student population

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the Education Bureau's (EDB) planning for the provision of public sector primary and secondary school places, as well as the latest development of the relevant measures, to cope with the changes in student population.

Changes in school-age population

2. It is an indisputable fact that the school-age population is declining. The fertility rate in Hong Kong has shown a decreasing trend since 2016 and the number of births was record low in 2022 (the provisional figure of newborns is 32 500). Developed economies in Asia and around the world share Hong Kong's phenomenon of decreasing fertility rates, leading to the reduced proportion of young-age population. According to the "Hong Kong Population Projections" released by the Census and Statistics Department in September 2020, the projected school-age population aged 6 residing in Hong Kong will decrease from 57 300 in 2023 to 50 000 in 2029. The school-age population aged 12 residing in Hong Kong is estimated to decrease from 71 600 in 2023 to 60 100 in 2029. It is projected that the number of school places, as well as schools, may correspondingly decrease with the drop in school-age population.

Long-term planning and policy considerations

3. In light of the continuous decline in school-age population, EDB will accordingly make adjustments in planning for the supply of school places. With top priority accorded to the interests of students and aiming for a "soft landing", the number of schools would be adjusted in a gradual and orderly manner to ensure education quality and optimal use of public resources. Noting that the continuous decrease in school-age population is not transient but structural, we will adopt long-term measures in planning for public sector primary and secondary school places to ensure a healthy and sustainable education ecosystem. In the meantime, we have to take account of the pace of development in different

communities in a holistic manner and grasp the opportunity to redeploy and optimise resources, focusing on enhancing the overall education quality in meeting the various educational needs of students.

Stabilise the teaching and learning environment and enhance the quality of education

4. The structural decline in student population brings certain impact and challenges to schools. To this end, EDB keeps a close watch on the changing situation of school-age population and maintains timely communication with school sponsoring bodies (SSBs) and the frontline educators to ensure that the interests of students and quality of education would not be affected. In tandem, we encourage the education sector to formulate contingency plans in advance to enable a stable teaching and learning environment and smooth transition. In recent years, EDB has adopted multi-pronged measures to cope with the challenges arising from the structural changes in student population. These measures include:

Lead by example and adopt multi-pronged measures for government schools

5. EDB, being the SSB of government schools, has taken the lead in reviewing the sustainable development of government schools and adopting measures in a decisive manner to consolidate resources. We are formulating long-term development plans for individual government schools upon holistic assessments, taking account of various factors including education policies, changes in school-age population, demand of school places in respective districts, overall development needs of government schools and utilisation of government resources, etc.. We adopt multi-pronged measures to address the individual circumstances of the districts and schools. For example, with a view to alleviating the impact of continuous declining demand for school places in certain school nets, EDB would cease the operation of schools with persistent under-enrolment, merge or relocate schools in districts with a relatively significant surplus of school places to districts with greater demand for school places or New Development Areas which are expected to have a greater demand for school places to alleviate the pressure of schools in student admissions by reducing the supply of school places in the districts concerned. The merger of Lung Cheung Government Secondary School and Kowloon Technical School in the 2022/23 school year not only alleviated the situation of excessive supply of school places in Wong Tai Sin District but also helped to consolidate resources of the two schools to provide

students with a more suitable teaching and learning environment and richer learning experiences. Students were provided a broader and more balanced curriculum to meet their diverse learning and development needs. Besides, through the merging, synergy is enhanced and strengths of the two schools can be further leveraged to enhance the quality of learning and teaching. The cross-district reprovisioning of Canton Road Government Primary School in the 2025/26 school year will meet the demand for school places in the new development area while reducing the supply of school places in the original district of the school.

6. Meanwhile, noting the projection of the future demand of school places, EDB is proactively communicating with SSBs with a view to planning ahead schools' development options, which include ceasing the operation of schools with prolonged under-enrolment; merging or reprovisioning schools to districts with new demand for school places, etc.. As such, the impact arising from the structural decline in school-age population could be alleviated as far as possible and the well-being of students and quality of education could be ensured.

Cease operation of time-limited primary schools as planned

7. In addition, EDB is reducing the supply of school places in a gradual and orderly manner taking into account the actual situations. Four time-limited primary schools¹ which have helped cope with the transient increase in Primary One (P1) student population in the past will cease operation gradually as planned. Three of them have started the cessation of P1 admission starting from the 2019/20 school year, while the remaining one has also started the cessation of P1 admission starting from the 2022/23 school year as planned. The time-limited primary schools mentioned above will cease operation in the 2024/25 and 2027/28 school years respectively.

Embracing the challenges for continuous optimisation of education

8. Attaching great importance to the quality of education, the Government has been allocating substantial resources to improve the school ecosystem,

¹ Starting from the 2015/16 school year, SSBs have operated time-limited schools in three vacant school premises in Kwun Tong and Yuen Long Districts from the 2015/16 to 2023/24 school years respectively. To cope with the transient shortfall of P1 school places, starting from the 2018/19 school year, an SSB has operated a time-limited aided primary school in a vacant school premises in Tai Po District from the 2018/19 to 2026/27 school years.

enhance teaching and learning, and support the development of quality education. For example, in 2023-24, the estimated total government expenditure on education is \$114.7 billion, of which \$104.0 billion is recurrent expenditure, representing an increase of \$6.3 billion over the previous year. This accounts for about 18.6% of the estimated total government recurrent expenditure. The recurrent expenditure on education has increased by 53% over the past decade, with an average growth rate of about 4.9% per annum, which demonstrates the Government's long-term commitment to investing in education.

9. The Government has been improving the quality of education by significantly increasing education expenses for improvement measures covering education manpower, funding and hardware, etc., benefitting students and teachers. As for teaching manpower, the teacher-to-class ratio for public sector primary and secondary schools (including special schools) has increased by 0.1 across-the-board starting from the 2017/18 school year; the all-graduate teaching force policy was implemented in public sector primary and secondary schools in the 2019/20 school year; the manpower arrangements of vice-principals in public sector primary and secondary schools and arrangements of senior teachers in public sector secondary schools have been improved starting from the 2020/21 school year; and improving the manpower at the middle management level and rationalising salaries for school heads and deputy heads in public sector primary schools starting from the 2022/23 school year. With the implementation of various measures, the overall teacher-to-student ratios in public sector and Direct Subsidy Scheme secondary schools and primary schools have further improved from 1:14.2 and 1:14.3 respectively in the 2012/13 school year to 1:10.9 and 1:12.0 respectively in the 2022/23 school year.

10. Apart from additional teaching manpower, EDB has in recent years enhanced the provision of specialist staff in schools to cater for the diverse needs of students. These measures include the creation of the posts of school-based speech therapist and Assistant Social Work Officer, and the creation of a School Executive Officer post to lessen the administrative work of teachers, thereby enabling them to better focus on teaching. Cash grants under specific policy objectives have also been provided to allow schools the flexibility in deploying additional resources to employ additional contract teachers and ancillary staff or hire outside services to meet the operation and development needs of schools for continued improvement.

Enhancing school facilities

11. Besides, the Government has been continuously enhancing the environment and facilities of school premises. At present, there are about 900 public sector schools in the territory. They were built in different periods according to the building standards at the time of construction, and facilities in the premises substantially vary. The building standards have been raised over the years to keep up with the times. Notwithstanding the decline in student population, the resources invested by the Government to improve the learning and teaching environment have never diminished. A total of 35 public sector school building projects have secured funding approval from the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council (LegCo) or have been completed over the past six years (from April 2017 to March 2023) with an estimated total construction cost exceeding \$12 billion in money-of-the-day prices. Among the 35 school building projects, 28 projects were reprovisioning, in-situ redevelopment or expansion of existing school premises, while the remaining seven projects were for meeting new demand (list at **Annex**). The above demonstrates the Government's commitment and the importance attached to education.

12. Given the declining school-age population, the Government has already made it clear that our school allocation in the future will mainly focus on reprovisioning of schools for supporting their continuous improvement and enhancing their learning and teaching environment. In view that the number of school-age children in a district will change with population movement and the provision of school places will be adjusted accordingly, construction of new school premises is necessary to meet the demand for school places arising from large-scale new housing developments in individual districts. To this end, EDB would consider cross-district reprovisioning, so as to reprovision schools in districts with a surplus of school places to districts with greater demand for school places, so as to rationalise the demand and supply of school places among districts. In fact, in response to the natural flow of population, EDB has all along been planning school building projects ahead based on the projected school-age population and the development needs of individual districts to gradually improve the hardware of schools for enhancing education quality in Hong Kong and our overall competitiveness.

13. The Government has been putting in resources to upgrade the standards of existing school premises. For example, based on the consensus reached with the sector earlier on, the Government first focused on addressing the problems

arising from the unique design features of “matchbox-style school premises”. The related improvement works had commenced progressively since the summer of 2017 and was completed by 2019, involving a total expenditure of \$70 million. In tandem, based on the valuable experience gained from the improvement programme on “matchbox-style school premises” and having regard to the views of the school sector, the Government earmarked another \$1 billion for a two-year minor works programme. Under the programme, minor works would be carried out for some 600 aided schools operating in premises built according to previous building standards, with a view to facilitating a more flexible use of existing space by schools, and hence enhancing the teaching and learning environment and efficacy. A total of 2 065 projects were approved under the programme, most of which have already been completed. It is expected that the remaining works (about 2%) will be completed in 2023-24.

The way forward

Effective use of public resources to enhance whole-person development

14. The fundamental aim of education is to cultivate values for leaders of tomorrow. Diversified operation mode and society-wide active involvement in the running of schools are the features and advantages of the Hong Kong Education System. Schools were established in different eras with the original intention of educating and nurturing students. To achieve the aim of nurturing students’ whole-person development, the overall student population should not be too small in order to provide students with a broad and balanced curriculum with extensive learning experiences, lest the diversity in learning and teaching and the social development of students would be hindered. Taking secondary education as an example, the class size and overall student population of a secondary school should not be too small, lest it would affect students’ subject choices, class allocation, and opportunities to participate in diversified learning activities and group interactions, which may go against the principle of whole-person development of the New Senior Secondary academic structure. Hence, in planning for the provision of public sector school places and the development of schools, we must make our decisions with the learning interests of students as our prime consideration. To invariably keep the existing number of schools or classes would not only go against the principle of optimising the use of public resources, but also hinder the whole-person development and diversified learning opportunities for students, which is not conducive to enhancing the quality of education.

15. In this connection, we will continue to plan the provision of public sector Secondary 1 (S1) places in the light of the territory-wide situation, ensuring sufficient school places to meet the demand. Given that the demand for S1 places in each district fluctuates from year to year, EDB provides school choices in neighbouring districts for students in districts with shortage of school places through the netting arrangements mechanism with neighbouring districts, to address the concerns and needs of different stakeholders. When making netting arrangements, EDB will take into account a number of factors, including the demand and supply of school places in each district, the locations of schools, the associated transport facilities, etc..

16. EDB will continue to review the demand and supply for school places based on the established framework of strategies and the latest school-age population, and also the arrangement on the number of students allocated to each class from the multiple perspectives of education quality, policy, audit and resource utilisation, in order to cope with the structural challenge of a declining demand for secondary school places. Owing to the projected decline in S1 school-age population in 2025 and beyond, we decide that the current-term Government the S1 allocation class size would not be reverted to 34 (i.e. place reinstating) as originally scheduled for the 2023/24 to 2026/27 school years. Nevertheless, we will closely monitor the demographic changes in student population, and conduct dynamic assessment of the demand and supply of school places, with a view to tackling the challenges arisen from the structural decline in school-age population in a reasonable and orderly manner.

Continue to implement small class teaching in primary schools

17. As indicated by the Chief Executive in the 2022 Policy Address, the Government will continue to implement small class teaching (SCT) in public sector primary schools in an orderly manner, with a view to achieving SCT in over 90% of these schools after two school years (i.e. the 2025/26 school year). Upon reviewing the latest situations such as the availability of classrooms, the demand for school places, the needs of school development and the availability of existing resources, EDB has already arranged 31 schools to start implementing SCT in the 2023/24 and 2024/25 school years and arranged for seven additional public sector primary schools to start implementing SCT in the 2024/25 school year. It is expected that by then, over 90% of the public sector primary schools will implement SCT, achieving the target one year in advance.

18. In fact, SCT is a teaching strategy that capitalises on the advantages of smaller class environment to enhance students' learning effectiveness. All along, EDB has been listening to the sector's view on the one hand, and carefully looking into the demand for school places in individual districts/school nets, the availability of classrooms and other relevant factors at the same time, so as to put forward SCT in a pragmatic and flexible manner. With the declining school-age population, we believe that more school nets will be better positioned to implement SCT. We will continue to communicate with the schools and encourage them to get prepared for early implementation of SCT if conditions permit, so as to further enhance the quality of teaching.

Continue to strengthen professional training to ensure education quality

19. EDB has all along been committed to maintaining a teaching profession of high quality and closely monitoring the manpower situation of teachers in public sector schools for timely and appropriate measures to ensure the quality of education and smooth operation of schools. The Government has been prudent in the planning for manpower requirement of the teaching force. To meet the needs of our society, a blueprint of human resources for the teaching profession will be drawn up in a triennial planning cycle. With the declining school-age population, the demand for teachers would decrease correspondingly. EDB will continue to monitor the situation and plan for teacher education places in a prudent manner.

20. In the meantime, we will continue to strengthen professional training for the teaching force to ensure quality. We will strengthen the professional competencies of in-service teachers through diversified professional development programmes and activities to keep them abreast of the latest development. Starting from the 2020/21 school year, EDB has developed a training framework for newly-joined teachers, in-service teachers and teachers aspiring for promotion, and provided structured core training for newly-joined teachers and teachers aspiring for promotion. In addition, to enhance teachers' professional knowledge and teaching competencies, EDB has been providing teachers with professional training related to curriculum, teaching and assessment, learning and teaching resources, as well as various school-based support services to facilitate their collaboration and peer learning through different modes of professional development such as subject-based, cross-curriculum, joint-school, cross-professional or regional network. Having regard to the key focuses and future

trends of curriculum such as STEAM education, national education, Chinese culture, EDB will continue to strengthen teachers' professional training so as to enhance professional capacity of teachers and quality of education, create a more diversified and excellent learning environment for students.

Conclusion

21. SSBs have all along been playing an important role in developing their schools. To meet the needs of the society, different SSBs operated schools and provided valuable learning opportunities for Hong Kong students. With the changes in Hong Kong population structure, some schools may accomplish their historic mission. We encourage and support SSBs, in the interest of the society at large, to explore feasible options in light of district and school circumstances. SSBs may make reference to EDB's strategic planning for long-term development of government schools, and adopt decisive measures to consolidate resources in an orderly manner for enhancing synergy and education quality. SSBs could make early preparations and seize the opportunities for long-term planning to actively respond to the needs of the society in different domains of service. Nevertheless, EDB will continue to meet with different SSBs to discuss strategies, work in close collaboration with other related government departments to provide appropriate support for SSBs concerned in light of the actual circumstances.

22. On the whole, EDB will, with the well-being of students as its prime consideration, suitably deploy and allocate resources appropriately, as well as focus on enhancing quality education for our students. We will closely monitor the changes in student population, keep the actual situation under review, and with the aim of "soft landing", continue to communicate and deliberate with the sector to explore ways to consolidate and integrate school resources through multi-pronged measures to stabilise the learning and teaching environment and ensure the quality of learning and teaching.

Education Bureau

March 2023

**School building projects with funding approved by the Financial Committee
of the Legislative Council or completed in the past six years**

**Sorted by financial year in which funding was approved*

(April 2017 to March 2023)

	Financial year in which funding was approved [Approved Project Estimate (Smillion)(in money-of-the- day prices)]^{Note 1}	Project (Project Code)	Completion/ Expected completion date
1.	2012-13 and 2013-14 ^(Note 2) [653.4]	Redevelopment of Ying Wa Girls' School (8094EB)	March 2019
2.	2014-15 [417.2]	Reprovisioning of Tung Wah Group of Hospitals Ma Kam Chan Memorial Primary School (3354EP)	July 2017
3.	2014-15 [373.7]	New school - Caritas Mother Teresa School (3107ET)	July 2017
4.	2010-11 and 2014-15 ^(Note 3) [318.7]	Redevelopment of St Francis' Canossian College (8090EB)	May 2018
5.	2014-15 [484.0 ^(Note 4)]	Reprovisioning of Po Leung Kuk Anita L.L. Chan (Centenary) School (3108ET)	March 2018
6.	2014-15 [484.0 ^(Note 4)]	Reprovisioning of Chi Yun School (3108ET)	July 2018
7.	2014-15 [148.8]	Extension of Baptist Lui Ming Choi Secondary School (8093EB)	August 2019
8.	2015-16 [256.6]	Reprovisioning of The Church of Christ in China Mongkok Church Kai Oi School (3110ET)	September 2018
9.	2015-16 [660.0 ^(Note 4)]	Reprovisioning of North Point Methodist Primary School (3351EP)	June 2018
10.	2015-16 [660.0 ^(Note 4)]	Reprovisioning of Pun U Association Wah Yan Primary School (3351EP)	November 2018
11.	2016-17 [446.7]	Reprovisioning of Cognitio College (Kowloon) (3271ES)	June 2019
12.	2016-17 [408.5]	Reprovisioning of Tung Wan Mok Law Shui Wah School (3109ET)	August 2019
13.	2016-17 [351.1]	Reprovisioning of S.K.H. St. John's Primary School (3353EP)	June 2019
14.	2016-17 [334.7]	New School - Hong Chi Shiu Pong Morninghope School (3111ET)	November 2019
15.	2016-17 [467.8]	Extension and Conversion of St. Paul's Primary Catholic School (8027EA)	June 2021
16.	2017-18 [345.5]	Reprovisioning of Pak Tin Catholic Primary School (3352EP)	June 2021

	Financial year in which funding was approved [Approved Project Estimate (\$million)(in money-of-the-day prices)]^{Note 1}	Project (Project Code)	Completion/ Expected completion date
17.	2017-18 [197.6]	Conversion of Heung Hoi Ching Kok Lin Association Buddhist Po Kwong School (8032ED)	June 2021
18.	2018-19 [386.1]	New School - The Salvation Army Centaline Charity Fund Queen's Hill School (3360EP)	June 2021
19.	2018-19 [386.6]	New School - Tung Wah Group of Hospitals Tseng Hin Pei Primary School (3361EP)	June 2021
20.	2018-19 [170.2]	Provision of Boarding Section of Hong Chi Pinehill School and reprovisioning of Boarding Section of Hong Chi Pinehill No. 2 School in Tai Po (8033ED)	July 2022
21.	2018-19 [81.4]	Extension of Munsang College (8096EB)	February 2023
22.	2019-20 [363.2]	New School - Tung Wah Group of Hospitals Tsoi Wing Sing Primary School (3358EP)	June 2022
23.	2019-20 [434.8]	Reprovisioning of Maryknoll Secondary School (3272ES)	June 2022
24.	2020-21 [61.2]	Extension of Hong Chi Morninghill School (3113ET)	March 2023
25.	2020-21 [285.3]	Partial Redevelopment and Conversion of the Hong Kong Chinese Women's Club College (8095EB)	Q1 2025
26.	2021-22 [427.3]	New School - PHC Wing Kwong Primary School (3365EP)	October 2023
27.	2021-22 [148.6]	Conversion to Shatin Public School (8031ED)	April 2024
28.	2021-22 [392.8]	Reprovisioning of The Church of Christ in China Chuen Yuen First Primary School (3356EP)	Q2 2024
29.	2021-22 [369.9]	Reprovisioning of Hong Kong Taoist Association Wun Tsuen School (3355EP)	Q2 2024
30.	2021-22 [365.4]	Reprovisioning of Po Leung Kuk Siu Hon Sum Primary School (3363EP)	Q2 2024
31.	2022-23 [779.8]	New School - Two special schools at Renfrew Road, Kowloon Tong (3112ET)	Q2 2026
32.	2022-23 [483.6]	Reprovisioning of Canton Road Government Primary School and new kindergarten run by New Territories Women & Juveniles Welfare Association Limited (3368EP)	Q2 2025
33.	2022-23 [455.3]	Reprovisioning of Father Cucchiara Memorial School (3359EP)	Q3 2025
34.	2022-23 [437.7]	Reprovisioning of Baptist Rainbow Primary School (3362EP)	Q3 2025

	Financial year in which funding was approved [Approved Project Estimate (\$million)(in money-of-the-day prices)]^{Note 1}	Project (Project Code)	Completion/ Expected completion date
35.	2022-23 [411.2]	Reprovisioning of Carmel Leung Sing Tak School (3364EP)	Q3 2025

Note 1 : As the accounts of the school building project are being finalised, we are unable to provide the actual construction cost.

Note 2 : The relevant construction cost was first approved in 2012-13, and was subsequently approved for increase in 2013-14 due to higher-than-expected tender prices and increase in price adjustment.

Note 3 : The relevant construction cost was first approved in 2010-11, and was subsequently approved for increase in 2014-15 due to higher-than-expected tender prices and increase in price adjustment.

Note 4 : As the construction contract covered more than one school, and the schools share some facilities upon commissioning, we are unable to provide the individual approved project estimate for each of the school building projects.